

# INNOVATING AND IMPROVING EDUCATION

## Information about Iowa's Race to the Top Phase 2 Application

**Helping every student prepare for whatever they do next in life: it's the goal of every parent and the priority for every school and educator in Iowa.** That is why Iowa continues to innovate and improve education across our state: to help every student realize success, have high expectations for all students, and provide the knowledge and skills for every student to be ready for tomorrow.

To support the work of school districts across the state in meeting those goals, Iowa is applying for Phase 2 of the federal Race to the Top grant, the \$4.35 billion competitive grant program.

In Phase 1, only two states – Delaware and Tennessee – were awarded funds. However, after analyzing scores and comments of our original application – as well as feedback from superintendents, school board presidents, and teachers association presidents from across the state – **Iowa can be competitive in the Phase 2 application process in a way that supports our education reform priorities as well as our commitment to local control.**

If your district decides to participate in Race to the Top, and Iowa is awarded a grant, it means:

- Your district is guaranteed to receive funds.
- Your district, regardless of whether it has a persistently lowest-achieving school (PLAS), is NOT required to implement one of the four intervention models provided by the U.S. Department of Education just by signing on to Race to the Top.
- If your district joins in this effort, it will help Iowa's chances to receive this grant, money we can all use to further our vision of reform and innovation to better meet the needs of all students — a priority we all share.

This document provides an overview of Iowa's Race to the Top application, including:

- Iowa's priorities in the Phase 2 application;
- Adjustments being made from the Phase 1 to the Phase 2 application;
- The process to take part in this effort – including the need for participants to sign a new Memorandum of Understanding – and key resources for additional information.

## OUR PRIORITIES

**As members of Iowa's education community, we are preparing students for their future.**

But that future is changing. Our students are facing a world in which local business occurs globally, technology breaks down old barriers, and information is infinite. Iowa is committed to providing students with an education that helps them succeed not only in today's world, but in the unknown landscape of tomorrow. This is why Iowa's Race to the Top application will support reforming education in our state, with a focus on four key areas:

- Provide intensive support for our state's lowest-achieving schools;
- Continue to build a balanced assessment system that includes multiple measures of student achievement and growth;
- Further develop a valid and reliable teacher and principal evaluation system that will inform instructional improvement and professional learning opportunities;
- Integrate the national Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics into the Iowa Core.

## OUR REVISIONS

The process of submitting a Phase 1 Race to the Top application has provided Iowa with a good amount of information, insight and observations on where our strengths lie as well as areas that can be more clearly addressed during Phase 2.

For example, reviewers of Iowa's Phase 1 application appreciated our plan to develop a competency-based education system and recognized its connection with our Race to the Top priorities. However, our application did not always make clear the breadth, depth, and transformational nature of the Iowa Core.

Therefore, a key emphasis of Iowa's Phase 2 application is the development of a competency-based education system, with the Iowa Core as a main vehicle for getting there. A competency-based system of education is designed to ensure students master a set of specific competencies or skills. Students demonstrate learning but by actually demonstrating learning through application to real-world tasks. A competency-based system of education is more flexible and responsive to students' needs. It allows students to move at their own pace and to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in multiple ways not limited to standardized tests.

Based on feedback to Iowa's Phase 1 application, the following is a summary of key revisions and adjustments that will be made in the Phase 2 application:

**(A) State Success Factors**

Competency based education will be an ‘umbrella’ for state success factors, with the Iowa Core being our central strategy for getting there. We further will make a stronger case for how trends in Iowa students’ performance on NAEP have caused the state to coalesce around our major reform program, the Iowa Core. We will build on our historically high student achievement to demonstrate how our commitment to reform will have an impact on student achievement in the coming four years and beyond.

**(B) Standards and Assessments**

Iowa’s initial plan for adopting national Common Core Standards and integrating them with the Iowa Core remains. These standards are currently being developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. In our second application, we will more clearly describe the process to adopt these standards. A centerpiece of Iowa’s application is the investment of Race to the Top funds in developing multiple, authentic measures of student achievement and growth that are comparable across classrooms. Iowa will do this development work with other states in English-language arts and mathematics. Since the Phase 1 application, three of the multi-state consortia originally established to develop common assessments in English-language arts and mathematics have merged into one – the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium – which Iowa has joined. Iowa also will develop assessments of the essential concepts and skills not captured in these common assessments.

**(C) Data Systems to Support Instruction**

Reviewers were very complimentary of the work Iowa has completed to strengthen systems and policies related to the availability and use of student and statewide data, and so significant changes to this section of the application will not be needed. The one change that we are including – and celebrating – is that Iowa recently won a federal Teacher Quality Partnership grant. This is a major accomplishment for our state to lay the groundwork for improved teacher effectiveness. Iowa will be able to support new ways to collect and use samples of teacher work to improve professional development. Both the Teacher Quality Partnership and Race to the Top grants will support districts as they undertake these tasks.

**(D) Great Teachers and Leaders**

Iowa’s application will improve the way plans to develop and support great teachers and leaders in our schools are described. Iowa will continue to expect districts to conduct fair evaluations and provide teachers and principals with the supports they need to improve in areas where their evaluations fall short. The Race to the Top program requires states to define “effective” and “highly effective” teaching and leading as a component of an

evaluation system, and requires states to include student achievement and growth as a significant factor in teacher and principal evaluation. Iowa will provide more details about our plans to collaborate with districts and their teachers associations in coming up with these definitions and evaluation plans. The multiple measures of student achievement and growth described in standards and assessment will contribute to a valid and reliable evaluation system. Though we lost points in the Phase 1 review, Iowa will not attach high-stakes decisions to student achievement and growth until these measures are developed. Iowa's application will also highlight that the state's key function in teacher and leader evaluation is to train evaluators, ensuring consistency across districts and ultimately a fair and credible evaluation system.

#### **(E) Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools**

Recent legislation (S.F. 2033) – which requires districts and teacher associations to negotiate an intervention model – only applies to school districts with one or more persistently lowest-achieving school (PLAS) identified in January 2010. In addition, districts that sign an MOU for Phase 2 are *NOT required* to implement one of the four intervention models provided by the U.S. Department of Education in order to receive Race to the Top funds. However, districts that choose to implement one of the four intervention models may benefit from four years of additional Race to the Top funds to assist in turning around their PLAS.

## **THE PROCESS**

**Participation by Iowa school districts in the Race to the Top program is voluntary, but greater participation improves Iowa's chances for success.** In order to be eligible to receive funding through the Race to the Top grant, the federal government requires that a school district sign and submit a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Iowa Department of Education. If your school district signed an MOU in Phase 1, a new MOU must be signed to take part in this second application. The MOU outlines the actions the district must agree to take in order to receive Race to the Top support.

Districts have considerable leeway in determining exactly how they will perform the scope of work in the Race to the Top program. If Iowa is successful in receiving a Race to the Top grant, districts will have 90 days to finalize their scope of work. The MOU is available in the Race to the Top section of the Iowa Department of Education's website at [www.iowa.gov/educate](http://www.iowa.gov/educate).

**Half of the Race to the Top grant will go directly to participating districts.** Iowa will apply for the maximum allowable amount, \$175 million. Therefore, \$87.5 million would be available to districts. The Department also will allocate additional funds for districts that apply to

participate in more intensive work in years 1 and 2 in each of the Race to the Top priorities. All participating districts would have the opportunity to engage in more intensive work and receive additional funds in years 3 and 4.

**Prompt attention to this opportunity is critical to its success.** Key dates in preparing Iowa's application are:

- The week of April 26: Live webinars for superintendents, school board presidents, and teacher association presidents will be held this week to discuss in detail changes being made in the Phase 2 application and to answer questions.
- May 14: The MOU is due on this day by 4:30 p.m.
- June 1: Race to the Top Phase 2 applications due to the U.S. Department of Education.

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

For information on Iowa's Race to the Top plans, including responses to frequently asked questions, the new Memorandum of Understanding, the state's Phase 1 application and other information, go to the Race to the Top section of the Iowa Department of Education's website:

**[www.iowa.gov/educate](http://www.iowa.gov/educate)**

For information on the federal Race to the Top program, including the application form, go to the U.S. Department of Education's website:

**[www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html)**

## **Key Contacts on Iowa's Race to the Top Application**

### **Application Content and Process**

Kevin Fangman  
Administrator, Division of PK–12 Education  
Iowa Department of Education  
515-281-3333  
[Kevin.Fangman@iowa.gov](mailto:Kevin.Fangman@iowa.gov)

Circe Stumbo  
President, West Wind Education Policy  
Race to the Top Consulting Partner  
877-354-9378 ext. 100  
[Circe@westwinded.com](mailto:Circe@westwinded.com)

### **Media Inquiries**

Elaine Watkins-Miller  
Communications Consultant  
Iowa Department of Education  
515-281-5651

### **Technical Issues Relating to MOUs**

Bonnie McIntosh  
Chief Operating Officer  
West Wind Education Policy  
877-354-9378 ext. 102

Elaine.Watkins-Miller@iowa.gov

westwind@westwinded.com